payment of retirement benefits to the ex-officers of the IDPL who retired from the service prior to 1998; and

(b) whether any representation has been received in this behalf, if so, what are the details thereof and what action Government have taken or propose to take in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS (SHRI RAMESH BAIS): (a) and (b) Representations have been received from retired employees of IDPL for payment of retirement benefits due from IDPL. This is getting delayed due to financial constraints of IDPL. Pending a decision on the future of the company by BIFR, Government is providing assistance to IDPL for payment of salaries/wages to its employees.

Forest cover in H.P.

640. SHRI K. M. KHAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Himachal Pradesh has achieved the 33 per cent target of the covered area of forest, fixed in the National Policy of Forests;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is a fact that huge area of forests in Solan district of Himachal Pradesh is being destroyed on account of blasting in sand mining; and

(d) if so, what steps are being taken to stop issuing licences for sand mining in Government as well as private lands?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) As per State of Forest Report, 1997 forest cover in Himachal pradesh is 22.5% of the geographical area.

(b) to (d) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.